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DE RUEH KI #0944/01 3031217
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8691
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000944

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [PREF](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: GOMA UPDATE OCTOBER 28-29: GOMA QUIET, BUT
TENSE; MONUC IMPLEMENTS "GOMA DEFENSE LINE"

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Fighting has resumed the morning of October 29 near Kibumba. On October 28, approximately 200 CNDP troops entered the Virunga Forest, although it was uncertain whether they were headed south towards Goma or west to link up with other CNDP forces near Sake. There are conflicting reports as to whether CNDP or MONUC occupy Rutshuru, although it is clear that FARDC forces have fled the town. MONUC has implemented its "Goma defense line," designed to prevent CNDP access to the city on the main thoroughfares. MONUC admits that, because of the terrain, it would be impossible to prevent some nighttime CNDP infiltration into Goma. End summary.

CNDP Troop Movements

¶2. (SBU) As of 10:00am on October 29, the military situation was relatively calm in North Kivu, although there has been some fighting around Kibumba. MONUC and FARDC remain in control of the town, which is the southernmost location where active fighting has occurred. MONUC reported that CNDP forces managed to go around Kibumba at one point on October 28, but MONUC helicopter gunships stopped their advance. Fighting resumed the morning of October 29 when MONUC attack helicopters cleared CNDP positions around Kibumba, with FARDC elements moving in to occupy the positions.

¶3. (SBU) There have been no further sightings of CNDP forces in the Virunga Forest. On October 28, small groups of CNDP forces, not larger than 30 troops each, moved into the thick forest. Total numbers were 200. It was unclear whether these troops were moving south or west. Southward movement could indicate the intent to infiltrate Goma, perhaps under the guise of IDP's. Westward movement could indicate the intent to link up with CNDP forces near Sake. MONUC and NGO's reported that CNDP troops had built up their numbers around Sake and north towards Katchanga.

Situation in Rutshuru Unclear

¶4. (SBU) There were conflicting reports on October 28 as to whether MONUC or CNDP actually controlled Rutshuru town. The FARDC clearly retreated from the town, supposedly after it roughed up some of the local population and humanitarians. One contact described the situation in Rutshuru as "hell," with NGO staff bunkered down inside buildings with gunfire everywhere.

¶5. (SBU) Later on October 28, some NGO staff attempted to evacuate to Beni in a convoy, but angry FARDC soldiers, throwing rocks at the convoy, prevented this, forcing the convoy to return to Rutshuru. FARDC also blocked a MONUC patrol sent to escort the NGO staff. Currently, there appears to be both MONUC and CNDP forces in Rutshuru in a quasi-standoff. MONUC stated that it does not have the necessary forces to remove the CNDP from the town.

¶6. (SBU) In a military brief to humanitarian organizations, MONUC

advised aid workers to inform their staff outside of Goma to remain indoors for the moment and not to attempt to evacuate to Goma or elsewhere. MONUC noted that, in the current situation, it had to prioritize ongoing combat operations and would not have the resources to escort humanitarian staff.

MONUC Activates "Goma Defense Line"

¶17. (SBU) On October 28, MONUC activated its "Goma defense line." This defense comprises 2-3 companies outside of Goma at Monigi (between Goma and Kibumba), the Mugunga barrier (between Goma and Sake), and Rosayo (between Sake and Kimoka). These positions cover high speed avenues of approach to Goma. MONUC has transferred a platoon from Beni to reinforce these positions, and it is seeking additional support from around the DRC.

¶18. (SBU) MONUC admits that it would be impossible to stop all CNDP infiltration into Goma from the north, as the forest spills into a rocky lava field followed by banana plantations leading right up to the city limits. Particularly at night, given MONUC's limited manpower and night vision capability, CNDP could easily slip through MONUC lines.

¶19. (SBU) Comment: One of MONUC's three "holy grails," the Rutshuru town, has apparently fallen or is in real danger of falling into CNDP hands. MONUC publicly claims it will undertake an operation to dislodge the CNDP from Rumangabo and clear the road to Rutshuru, but it is unclear where the necessary resources will come from. If MONUC remains alongside CNDP forces in Rumangabo and Rutshuru, it

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risks becoming involved in an urban conflict. End comment.

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